returns to the hands of the women. 423

The following example may explain the customs involved here and further sift them out even though it scarcely throws a pleasant light on the dissensions which have been introduced among the Khasi people as a result of the divisions of the various Christian religions which are arising for their conversion.

In the village Kyndongngâh, a man had gradually acquired some property for himself with 15 cows and cows, /Wô/ a decent hut and furnishings and 3 beautiful rice fields, large enough to sustain a family clan. After his death the youngest daughter of his sister, named Ka Pilang Khai Syndîh, was considered the valid heiress. She was still under age and her mother was already dead. As a result a sister of this mother, named Ka Pilang Khai [illegible] over the management

428 727 413

11. Pas and Syndai are Khasi names. Pilang Khai is the name of the family, clan; literal meaning: shining plane.

of the inheritance and lived with the little heiress in the clan hut. There was no doubt that the latter would receive the entire property after she reached her majority. After a while, a young Catholic, U Salomon Tarsh, wooed for Syndîh's hand. Thereupon the older siblings, a brother and a sister, both of whom belonged to the Methodist Church, became enraged. In spite of all the hostility, the young girl stuck to her decision, married Tarsh and became Catholic. The young married couple had to flee from the clan hut because of the anger of the siblings. The latter ought to have the dear disinherited, but the other relatives involved would have nothing to do with this. They were so carried away by their anger that they did what was considered a crime even in the eyes of the heathen: they drove the cattle away secretly and sold it. Likewise they cleared out the clan hut and even sold two rice fields. On complaint to the competent court, Syndîh was finally granted her right: she could take over the clan hut and the family property which was meanwhile greatly diminished. 426 727 813 413

Although the Khasi who have been converted to Christianity do not need to be bound by the laws of succession in inheritance and although this is often recognized by the heathen Khasi, there is no hindrance put in their way by the Catholic Church to following their native tribal customs in this matter. The Catholic Khasi themselves do not wish to deviate from them: /Wô/ a dogged attachment to ancient customs and a respect for them are in their blood. Here are a few examples.

In Nongkseh the Catholic clan mother Ka Jakena Synah, wife of U Sudhan Tarsh, died without leaving any female descendants. It would

have been understood if the only son U Johannes Suneh, according to the ruling custom of Christians elsewhere, had claimed the considerable inheritance of rice fields, forest, and lore. A serious objection would not have been expected either from the officials or the relatives. Johannes was also spoken to about it in this fashion, but in vain. He could not conquer the inner revulsion of acting against ancient tribal customs for a temporal advantage. His simple answer was: "If I am a good Catholic, God will bless me in other ways without my going against our ancient customs." And so matters stood. The whole property went to the youngest daughter of the sister of the deceased. His branch of the family was still heathen. Through industry and economy Johannes finally acquired his own household with a goodly piece of land.

The Catholic Khasi even get rid of possessions readily which they already possess if the tribal customs demand it. It happened unfortunately several years ago that both the wife of the chief teacher of the Catholic Khasi public school in Shillong, U Thomas Rylan, as well as the wife of the cook of the mission station there, U Sebastian Nissh, were both carried away by death within a short time. Both men had acquired very nice property by their industry. According to Khasi law they had no further claims on their children who were still quite small. They belonged to the clan of their deceased wives and had to be taken by them and raised. According to Khasi law, the property that they had acquired also passed to the youngest daughter. Willingly each of them handed over the children and the interim management of the property to the relatives of the deceased wives, took the few clothes and purely personal possessions /87/ with them and sought to begin again from the beginning in the second half of a hut. To my question, whether that had been hard for them, they answered with quiet matter-of-fairness: "But that is the custom among us Khasi."

It is not necessary to emphasize especially that such respect for the tribal customs has made only a favorable impression on the Khasi who are still heathen.

Further relates (1) that the clan mother loses her position in the

(1) Vgl. Gheon, p. 98.

family when she changes her religion, for example at her conversion to Christianity, and that the youngest daughter takes her place. The justification for this law is the fact that she does no longer belongs to the religion and reason after the customary family worships.

Because of her whole position as guardian of the inherited religion and customs, it is not frequent that such a woman breaks with the ancestor cult. If this does happen, it does not necessarily mean that she loses the native property. That depends really on the position the other members of the family take. If they are all still firm heathens, who wish to have nothing to do with Christianity, they can force the clan mother to give everything up. The high respect for her is frequently so great, however, that either the whole clan or at least a part of it decides to take the same way and change religions with the clan mother. The part that remains heathen will certainly propose a division of the family property. This is also possible in other cases.

6. Division of the Family Property.

Although it is rare, the weal and woe of a family-clan can necessitate that a family-clan be split into two clans /Clan/ and that a division of the common property be undertaken. The basis for this is if the family /Geschlecht/ becomes too big, if the elders in the family council /Rat/ are no longer united and hate and revenge threaten to destroy, if a part of the clan /Clan/ tries to seize the better fields by violence and refuses to deliver the harvest for the common need, if one branch has brought the whole clan /Sippe/ dishonor and shame by false oath, incest, revenge, treachery or some other severe crime. Only the guilty party will be excluded from the clan /Clan/ in such cases, if he remains stubborn and impenitent. But if he begs for forgiveness with his lips and participates in the expiatory sacrifice, forgiveness will not be refused him. But a certain inner tension and bad feeling often remain behind.

At the conversion to another religion, it often depends on how the clan mother and also the family elders are inclined towards the religion in question, and also on who is changing religions. If it is only brothers, sons, nephews, or grandsons, of the clan mother, a division is not of the question, since the men are not capable of inheriting. But if it is the youngest or next youngest daughter or even the sister of the clan mother, then a division of property can be undertaken. A clan mother after all is so attached to her child or her nearest blood relatives that she would not like to push them entirely away from herself unless she were completely set against the religion in question and angered. If that should be so in individual cases, the heiress concerned will still consider, whether it is not more advisable to wait to change her religion until the clan mother has closed her eyes and she then has freedom. Then the wish was mentioned at the conclusion of the previous session and so on.